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THE MONITOR BORDER BUSINESS

ACET SCHOLARSHIP

Gerardo Vaca Jr., from PSJA High School, is a recipient of a \$1,000 scholarship awarded by the Association of Compensatory Educators of Texas (ACET). | 2D

MARKET WEEKLY

JULY 15 CLOSING
VS. A WEEK AGO

DOW JONES
12,437.02

↓ -282.37

NASDAQ
2,762.67

↑ +99.14

NYSE
8,191.13

↓ -285.00

AMEX
2,378.07

↓ -33.65

RELIGION PAGES

Hear from local spiritual leaders and find out about upcoming events.
Inside | 2D, 4D, 5D

FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2011 | WWW.THEMONITOR.COM/SECTIONS/BUSINESS-NEWS

Cupcakes for a cause

>> New bakery owners give back as they sell sweet treats.

By Amy Nichol Smith
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MCALLEN — What do you get when you put Katy Perry, Hugh Hefner and Betty White in a box? At the RGV Cupcake Factory, you get three homemade, fluffy cupcakes topped with sweet frosting and toppings.

In June, sisters Erica and Sabrina Rodriguez of Mission and their friend Johanna Saenz of Donna jumped headfirst into the cupcake business.

The three speech pathologists had no experience in business, but they took a risk.

"We're not businesswomen," said Erica, 31. "We work in rehabs. We're on the opposite side of the spectrum."

Each obstacle was a learning experience for the bakers.

"We didn't know how much things cost, we didn't know what we needed," said Sabrina, 27. "We knew we had mixers and recipes, and good cupcakes, and that's all we need."

They quickly learned about grease traps, the cost of rewiring electricity, and plumbing. Johanna made several trips from her workplace in Donna to McAllen to meet with inspectors when they began the process of opening the storefront.

The idea of opening a cupcake shop came to Sabrina while visiting

Chicago.

While downtown, Sabrina wandered into a cupcake shop to check out the baked goods. The bakery offered four different flavors of premade cupcakes. Sabrina was excited about her chocolate cupcake, which she said was delicious, but she wanted to add sprinkles. The shopkeepers said no.

"I want a place where I can go and just get whatever I want," Sabrina said.

And so the "Create Your Own Cupcake" concept was born.

Customers can get creative with their cake, frosting and toppings, like gummy bears and sprinkles.

The flavors of cake, frosting and "inserts," or fillings, vary from day to day, depending on what the baker prepared that morning.

RGV Cupcake Factory's sweet treats are made fresh and from scratch every day.

The shop features a modest selection of cupcakes named after celebrities.

"Hugh Hefner" is a red velvet cupcake topped with cream cheese frosting and decorated with red velvet crumbs. It was named for the playboy's signature red smoking jacket and his frothy white hair.

The "Katy Perry" is a strawberry cupcake with vanilla butter cream that has colorful pixie dust swirls through it and a peppermint candy on top.

It isn't just the cupcakes that are christened.



PHOTO BY GAIL HERNANDEZ | GABRIEL@THEMONITOR.COM
Johanna Saenz arranges cupcakes for display July 9 at RGV Cupcake Factory in McAllen.

"We name everything," Erica said. "Our mixers, our oven ... 'Cruella de Vil' — she gives us trouble every day."

The cupcake shop has been an idea the three locals had been mulling about for the past two years, but whenever they saw an opportunity to start the business, one issue or another would set them back.

In 2009, Sabrina's husband landed in the hospital after a nearly fatal car wreck. Shortly after he recovered, Sabrina was diagnosed with cancer. Johanna then found out she had lupus.

Four months ago, Erica and Sabrina's father discovered he had stage four kidney cancer. Three weeks after the diagnosis, he died.

That was the last straw for the budding businesswomen.

"He passed away April 13," Sabrina said. "From that day, we just rolled with it."

They decided life was too short and opened the shop in honor of their father.

To pay more respect to their

father, the cupcake bakers offer the "Cupcake for a Cause." The strawberry cake with strawberry butter cream frosting was Sabrina and Erica's father's favorite flavor. The treat comes with a cupcake wrapper with a lilac ribbon attached, and all proceeds from the sale of those cupcakes go to the local chapter of the American Cancer Society.

"Everyone knows about the pink ribbon, but nobody knows about the lavender ribbon," Erica said. "Lavender ribbon represents everyone and everybody's cancer."

Aside from selling cupcakes, the three business owners hope to give whenever they can.

"It's not even all about cupcakes," Sabrina said. "I mean, well, we are all about cupcakes, but if we can just kind of incorporate (community service) in with the cupcakes, then hey, it's fun for us and it helps people out."

Amy Nichol Smith covers features and entertainment for The Monitor. She can be reached at (956) 683-4420.

WALL STREET ROUNDUP

GENERAL

STOCKS FALL AFTER REPORT

NEW YORK — Remarks by Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke that dimmed hopes for a third round of bond-buying pushed stocks lower Thursday, in a second day of testimony, Bernanke told lawmakers the Fed expects the economy to improve. He said the central bank would only step in with more economic stimulus if there is a significant downturn in the economy. "We're not prepared at this point to take further action," Bernanke said. Stocks turned immediately lower after the remarks and fell for much of the day. Bernanke was clarifying statements he made Wednesday that left the door open to new economic stimulus measures.

ENERGY

OIL HOVERES ABOVE \$98

SINGAPORE — Oil prices hovered above \$98 per barrel Thursday in Asia amid speculation about a possible new round of U.S. monetary stimulus while a rating agency put the country's credit rating under review for a downgrade. Benchmark oil for August delivery was up 12 cents to \$98.17 per barrel at late afternoon Singapore time in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Crude rose 62 cents to settle at \$98.05 on Wednesday. In London, Brent crude fell 3 cents to \$118.75 per barrel on the ICE Futures exchange. Some analysts expect crude will fall in the second half as global economic growth stalls. Capital Economics forecasts Brent will drop below \$90 by the end of the year.

"Wall Street Roundup" is compiled with Associated Press reports.

LOCAL BRIEFCASE

NEW VP NAMED AT FROST BANK

J. Omar Quintanilla has been promoted to vice president of corporate banking at Frost Bank's McAllen North Financial Center, according to a company news release.

Quintanilla, who manages the banking relationships of business customers and services their commercial loan portfolios, joined the bank in 1998 and is a graduate of St. Mary's University, where he earned his bachelor's degree in business administration, according to the release.

He is also the chairman of the McAllen Community Development Board and an alumnus of Leadership McAllen, according to the release.

See BRIEFCASE | 8D

COMMENTARY ROD SANTA ANA III | R-SANTAANA@TAMU.EDU



Microalgae could be Texas' next big cash crop

CORPUS CHRISTI — Just as corn and peanuts stunned the world decades ago with their then-newly discovered multi-billion-dollar uses and applications, Texas AgLife Research scientists in Corpus Christi think microalgae holds even more promise.

"It's a huge, untapped source of fuel, food, feed, pharmaceuticals and

even pollution-busters," said Carlos Fernandez, a crop physiologist at the Texas AgLife Research and Extension Center at Corpus Christi who is studying the physiological responses of microalgae to the environment.

There are an estimated 200,000 to 800,000 species of microalgae, microscopic algae that thrive in freshwater and marine systems, Fernandez said. Of all those species, only

35,000 have been described, he said. "We're only starting to scratch the surface of discovering the natural secrets of microalgae and their many potential uses and benefits," he said. "But already it's obvious that farmers will one day soon be growing microalgae on marginal land that won't compete with fertile farmland."

See SANTA ANA | 8D